

Middle Class Chinese Indonesians in Solo: In Search of New Identity in Post-Suharto's New Order

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Abstrak

Paper ini membahas tentang kelompok kelas menengah Tionghoa Indonesia di Kota Solo Propinsi Jawa Tengah. Berbasis penelitian etnografis, tulisan ini menggali bagaimana kelas menengah Tionghoa Indonesia meredefinisi peran dan identitas mereka. Dengan mengambil tiga aspek sosial, yaitu ekonomi, pendidikan, dan agama, tulisan ini mencoba melihat dinamika sosial masyarakat etnis Tionghoa pada rezim Suharto dan sesudah reformasi.

Key Words:

Chinese Indonesia; guanxi network; education; religion

Backgrounds

This paper attempts to portray middle class Chinese Indonesians² and how this class initiates and builds the new networks and social connection. The main focus of this paper is highlighting middle class

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2 The word "Chinese" and "Chinese Indonesians" will be used in this paper entirely. The word "Chinese" refers to Chinese in Indonesia or Chinese in Solo. The word "Chinese" does not insinuate either an expatriate or Chinese tourist, since all Chinese in this paper refer to Indonesian citizen.

Chinese Indonesians' current network building as dual response to the former violence experience they suffered in the 1998 riots and to the need for strengthening their social and cultural capital in post-riot period. Compared to poor and rich Chinese Indonesians, middle class Chinese Indonesians were apparently the most vulnerable and most of them have become the real victims during the riots.

Their post-riot efforts to be well-organized, thus, need to be seen partly as resulting from immense violent experience as well as ways to compensate their actual lack of financial resources and social ties with non-Chinese sections of population in the city. And this as made more possible with in the marked change in political structure in Post-Suharto period where issue of civil and political rights proliferates and shapes the ways the government and non-Chinese groups treat Chinese minority nation-wide.

Who actually middle class Chinese Indonesian is? Taking into account the discussion about middle class, middle class can be categorized as a group whose economic capital might not be as high as upper class and not as evidently low as lower class, but this group actually enjoys higher cultural capital. Middle class also has possibility to do vertical or upward mobility. Middle class group sees cultural properties as valuable properties that have immense effect on practices (Bourdieu, 1984, Swartz, 1997), for instance education. Middle class usually gives more attention to education (Devine, 2004 in Turner, 2006), instead of other type of properties. Based on this consideration, thus, profession-based categorization, such as academician or university teacher and social activist, represents the practice of middle class families (Swartz, 1997).

In correspondence with the characters of middle class, particularly middle class Chinese Indonesians, this paper goes into preference to choose informants based entirely on the professional categorization aforesaid. In contemporary context of Indonesian politics, the increasing participation of middle class Chinese in social and political matters has been so far influenced by the actively growing involvement of Indonesian middle class into public matters. Since the beginning of reformasi period (1998), Indonesian middle class has taken leading role in transforming political landscape and empowering the capacity of civil society alike.

The collapse of Suharto' regime tells us much about the political

power of this class of people as pressure group. It is also the fact that the sustainability of the reformasi has until now been facilitated by the political activity of the civil society that not only be guardian but also active proponent of the present government and parliaments at both national and local level. In such general context, political awareness and sensibility seems to arise among middle class Chinese Indonesians. After reformasi, Chinese Indonesians start to struggle for reclaiming their lost political and civil rights, as fundamental rights as Indonesian citizens. During this period, they actively involve in daily politics and in electoral democracy practices, as well as strengthen various forms of social activities that mark their rise into open negotiation with other identity groups.

In his discussion on Indonesian middle class, Niels Mulder (2000) notes the democratic direction Indonesia has taken so far, has much to do with the role and influence of the well educated and open minded people who mostly belong to this class. Middle class become the spokesperson for democracy and human rights, and endorse the government to crafting policies supportive to the fulfillment of people's basic needs. The current war on corruption as part of public appeal for government accountability and transparency are led by this class of various professions. However, such progress also gives caution that, as many evidences suggest, the loosely control of political role performed by this class has facilitated both the survival and revival of technocratic-ism and bureaucratic-ism in politics and potential of sectarianism and religious fundamentalism in public sphere. This dark side in the rise of civil society has it's propensity to weaken civil society movement and worse, mislead many segments of population into collective violence against each other (Mulder, 2000: 14, 110).

However, this paper will argue that Chinese Indonesia's involvement in civil society movements is partly prompted by post-conflict or post-violence situation. Violent conflict this minority group has experienced turns to have been a turning point from which they begin their struggle for freedom and recognition of their identity. In that struggle they actively negotiate with other identity groups in localities. The public appeal for political equality and multiculturalism, have compelled them to reflect on their experience of violence and abandonment as cause for the reclamation. Some of their core demands are fulfilled as can be seen during

Abdurrahman Wahid presidency (1999-2001), where the government and national bill assert their rights for conducting religious practice. Since that time, many restrictive policies on Chinese Indonesians have been amended and removed as civil society movement persistently keep their eye on the accountability of the government to enacting political and civil rights.

The changing in political setting as well as the amendment of policies addressing Chinese minority in Indonesia, on one hand has opened the pathways for Chinese to get more freedom and to actualize themselves as part of Indonesian nation-state. It is proven by the rise number of Chinese Indonesians who actively taking part into local and national politics. The Indonesian decentralization policies which has been asserted since 2001, has opened the opportunity for the emerging new middle class Indonesia, particularly in local or provincial level. The middle class such as teachers, academician, and middle level entrepreneur are mostly taking part in the local political arena. Especially among Chinese Indonesians community, this tendency has also been found. As examples, some Chinese Indonesians are now playing their role in local politics. Some of them are positing their selves as political party member, senator or even come forward as head of regency or governor. Besides, the violence they have ever experienced, has grown the awareness among them to get in touch with the social networks surrounded them. As marked, middle class Chinese Indonesians, as bigger in number than the poor and rich Chinese, have it's heterogeneous characters, which has also resulted in the differentiation of their responses to the post-conflict situation. It seems that they have been compelled to take many possible ways to cope with their security problem and negotiate with difference that marks societal and cultural life of Indonesian Society.

In anti-Chinese turmoil nation-wide, the case of Solo has confirmed that middle class Chinese has fallen into the category of the most violated group. Most of them were victims with no significant economic and cultural capital to enabling them negotiate with the violators and the insecure circumstances. Their social networks, which mostly limited to professional associations, did not work effectively mainly because during the riot what counts are financial resources as to buy protection and social relationship with the non-Chinese inhabitants/villagers as to be treated

similar or not slightly different from the rioters and the non-Chinese villagers.

In that situation, they actually had no prominent protecting mechanism and what they did is, among other, looking for haven in villages where their Chinese families, mostly poor, reside in peaceful coexistence with the non-Chinese inhabitants. Their goods and other valuable assets were rescued into the villages and protected by both the families and the villagers. But not all of them took that way since they could not claim to have familial relation with the Chinese villagers. This section of middle class sought haven in churches where they were protected by non-Chinese Christians. Christians in Solo comprise many non-Chinese from various ethnic backgrounds—the majority is Javanese Christians. This, of course, does not actually explain the strength of religious bond or strong solidarity among Christians. In fact, the protection defines a quick response by non-Chinese Christians as the Chinese came in rush to the church area and then provoked a sense of empathy among the non-Chinese Christian to protect them including valuable assets they brought with. Only few middle class sought safer place in neighbour cities like Yogyakarta, Magelang and Semarang.

Looking more specifically into middle class Chinese community, the most disadvantaged among middle class Chinese were those who ran medium business scale. They suffered a lot of lost in terms of trade and residence. Their shops and their business building were burnt down to the ground and their commodities and assets were looted by the rioters. It also happened to their houses which were located next to or directly mixed with their business building and shops. It is obvious that for the rioters such buildings symbolized prosperity and economic injustice alike regardless the fact that these sort of business is mostly medium scale and relatively similar with other non-Chinese shops in the city. While for the victims such lost means that they have to start their business at zero point. Shop building must be rebuilt, assets be bought, and a certain amount of money required to financing their new business activities.

Whilst in the riot, other Chinese groups (elites and working class) could optimized their own capital in—elites Chinese who maximised the use of economic capital and working class Chinese who employed their symbolic status as 'not proper Chinese' due to their low level of

wealth—middle class found difficulties in maximizing their social capitals and enlarging or deepening social bonds to protect them, due to the limitation or concrete lack of social capital. As discussed before, most of their associational activities revolved around their professional network. Few of them who are teachers, lecturers and public servants involved in specific professional network which somehow so limited in enlarging and deepening their social ties with other groups outside those professions. On the other hand, most of the middle class are traders and merchants who spent most of their time running their economic activities.

During the riots, the former, non-businessmen Chinese, were safe and their houses were not burnt down since they have lived life pattern similar to the non-Chinese inhabitants and been perceived of as 'part of us' by their neighbors and the rioters as well. However, this implies neither absence of feeling as minority nor lack of effort to strengthening their social by engaging themselves with broader spectrum of identity building in post riot period. Despite difference in degree and forms of coping with the past violence experience (the 1998 riot), those ethnically public servants Chinese and businessmen both have suffered traumatic experiences and been seeking to renegotiate their demographic and cultural status as minority with other identity groups by enmeshing themselves in networks with loose or tight associational ties, be they economic, educational and religious in nature.

Interestingly that for the Chinese Indonesians, experience of collective violence has resulted not only in how they redefine their national identity, but also in how they redefine their specific identity as Chinese, namely—as part of Indonesian Chinese and as part of overseas Chinese. Equally important is the fact that they see network building as something of great importance in the overall process of identity negotiation and reinvention. In practice, networks are various, starting from the traditional networks concerning economic relations (*guanxi*) to the more contemporary phenomenon like Charismatic Christian Church networks, which currently prevalent among Chinese Indonesians in Solo.

Whatever the form of network they take, it is obvious that the networks have begun to function as channeling their demands for security, recognition and self-development in the web of multicultural identities of Indonesian society. Those networks are not final product of their struggle,

but a function through which they continuously identify themselves, and in many cases those networks are overlapping in their function, combining many possible strategies and interests, be they economic and political, economic and cultural and so forth.

In the following treatment, I will discuss social aspects of middle class Chinese families as part of means that have influenced their attempts at reconstructing their identity in the post violence experiences in Solo. Based on several tendencies found in the field, the most taken channels the middle class Chinese are actively employing and so far proved effective in redefinition of their self-group identity are **(i) Guanxi networks** as family and economic network, **(ii) Education** as the pathways to building international connection and facilitating the invention of a sense of global citizen, and **(iii) Religion** in their search for sense of security and social identity, which is partly inclusive (engaging with non-Chinese Christians in Islam and Christianity) and partly exclusive (revivalism in Tao and Confucianism where the followers are mostly Chinese).

i. Guanxi, Economic and Familial Networks among Middle Class Chinese Indonesians in Solo

In highlighting the significance of this network, I start through the profile of Anto Tan³, who is one of my informants in Solo. I spent many times participating in his (and his fellow) activities. Through his networks I try to map connections, changes, and mobility of middle class Chinese Indonesians in Solo.

Anto Tan is the owner of small-scale jarak (castor) oil company. He told me enthusiastically that *jarak* oil business in the future will help the environment since it function to replace crude oil. Once, Anto invited me to join in the meeting with his colleague. He introduced me to Samekto, a Chinese *peranakan*, who was Anto's business partner. They planned to buy jarak seeds from farmers in East Java. They also talked about possibility whether Prasojo, one of the share owners of a biggest medicine and confectionery company in Solo, could contribute or take part in their *Jarak* seeds oil business. Prasojo is a conglomerate in Solo.

3 The names of people in this paper is anonymous, however the names of places, cities, and public figures remain unchanged.

Anto, Samekto, and Prasajo have known each other since long time ago

Chinese descends in Solo are basically acquainted to each other. Networks in business and trading are effective channel to communicate between Chinese groups in Solo. Since early reformasi period, Chinese associations have increased in number and intensity and this makes the emerging social network among Chinese Indonesian in Solo is possible. Moreover, social networks through business and trading, as well as associations have helped to build the connection at national and international level. Chinese Indonesians have admitted their strong feeling as Chinese overseas and their rising attachment to other Chinese overseas in around the world. This emotional attachment feeling is often strengthened through their involvement in the well organized links of Chinese social networks.

Network is so important for Chinese people overseas to maintaining and expanding their ties. It draws upon two approaches, firstly, through the creation of familial ties, and secondly, through economic connection between Chinese or so-called Guanxi. In Solo, these connective strategies appear through the emergence of associations that combine interest, kinship or the originality and Guanxi network. Most of all, they are characterized by familial bond and friendship.

As I examine from the fieldwork, Chinese associations in Solo are apt to utilize network and acting as a bridge between Chinese and non Chinese in Solo throughout their various activities, especially through benevolent acts as part of coping from the problem of minority by building good image. Chinese association is the arena to maintain kinship and friendship among Chinese in Solo which is valuable for trading network. As Ong (1999) asserts these types of paternal bond and interpersonal relations have given birth to the so called imagined community of Chinese overseas.

Prominence of kinship or originality criteria can be seen in the fact that the establishment and maintenance of the associations originate in how their members identify themselves as part of sub-ethnic group or coming from certain area or province in China, for example, association for Hokkian Chinese or Hakka Chinese, to mention the example is Yayasan Fu Qing as the organization for descendant from Fujian province.

In post-Suharto's Indonesia, where activities of Chinese Indonesians

associations were no longer banned, the number of familial association is improving. In post Suharto, Chinese associations have characterization to strongly encouraged Chinese cultural revitalization. Moreover, Chinese Indonesians have also started to organized themselves into their original province or sub-ethnic in China.

But on the other hand, they also tend to manage their familial connection into economic connection or so-called *guanxi*. For middle class Chinese Indonesians such as Anto, *guanxi* and familial-based associations have facilitated their efforts to reasserting their identity as overseas Chinese, making them more attached to one single identity: as part of global Chinese diaspora. It creates a sense of group identity they are longing for, a sense of strong community that might contribute to their capacity in dealing with violent circumstances in future. They also make clear that this *guanxi* network, however fragile is it, has offered them access to vertical mobility in economic terms. It is through this network that they are gradually exposed to greater opportunity to increase their economic capital which in time of crisis will of great assistance for them to enjoy physical security protection from hired police or non-Chinese inhabitants.

ii. Education and Emerging New Social Classes among Chinese Indonesian Family Post *Reformasi*

Education is a predominant achievement and means of social mobility among Chinese Indonesian. Through education, middle class Chinese families in Solo have enjoyed new vertical mobility. Education for middle class Chinese is somehow accessible and yet favorable one since it helps to shape their image as educated, well informed, and this is jumping stone to higher economic rank. In both Suharto and post Suharto period, middle class Chinese families in Solo have been categorized as the one enjoying greater chance and resources in terms of vertical mobilization through education.

Quantitatively speaking, the number of the member of middle class Chinese who have been educated or currently pursuing their higher education is fairly high in Solo. As many people mentioned in the field, Chinese Indonesian students in Solo have for years shown their good performance at school. However, such achievement incites dislike and

jealousy among non-Chinese groups in the city. Similar treatment comes from the school officials who, particularly in New Order period, seek to restrict their access to educational institution in the city. Personal experience from Martha, a doctor based in Pasar Gede, Solo, probably can describe how outstanding achievements of Chinese students at school allow more possibilities of being discriminated by majority groups, especially at the time of Suharto's New Order (Nurul Aini, 2003):

I graduated from junior high school with the very good grade. At that time, I applied to the best public high school in Solo. My parents and I considered that going to public school was better and cheaper, especially because my parents were not rich enough to send me to the Catholic school, for instance. But what we got, the head of the school told us, that there was a quota for Chinese students; it was about maximum 5 percent from total new students. The head of school said that it was a policy from the centre, from Jakarta (pusat). When my parents checked it out, there was no policy as such. And the head finally said, 'if we accept all the application from Chinese students then this school will be the school of Chinese students'.

The restriction of Chinese students to enter Indonesian public school was never explicitly mentioned in any national education policies, but the discrimination has been taking place for many years. It is in common perception that Chinese should not be enrolled in Indonesian public school or public university, otherwise they will dominate Indonesian public school. This condition has produced no resistance but efforts from the society to establish more and more private educational institutions where most of the Chinese students have entered and graduated. In Indonesia, Catholic schools are the most apparent. In the case of Martha, her parents finally decided to send her to Catholic school, even though it was a bit expensive, but fortunately the quality of the school is also good. Entering Catholic school furthermore has then become the rational choice for Chinese parents, particularly from middle class family.

Umar, a Chinese Indonesian working as Javanese language lecturer in a public university in Solo sent his son to a Catholic school in Yogyakarta, said that he even never think to send his son to public school, although he himself working as a public servant. As a public servant, he realized that it will be difficult for his son to compete to the public school enrolment, due to his Chinese-ness. As a lecturer in public university, he rarely has Chinese students.

Candrawan, another informant, a middle business owner, also preferred private school rather than public school. After graduated from high school, he admitted his son to go further study in Singapore. Now, his son is working in a company in Singapore and he is a permanent resident of Singapore. Candrawan acknowledged that Singapore promises a better life.

As public servant, Umar said that his son's achievement in education is a sort of vertical mobility in their family. On contrary, for many businessmen family, their children's achievement in education also means the end of their business' successors. For instance, Candrawan said that probably his business will be the last business, since none of his children seems want to continue his business.

Anto also shares that experience. He said that none of his children want to work on jarak oil business because the education has made them prefer to work on private company rather than continue his business or build up their own business. In the case of Umar, Candrawan, and Anto, I found that all of their children gave up with their parents business. All of their children have no willingness to inherit their parents business, as the result of getting education, both local and international education among middle class Chinese Indonesia.

The above description and examples confirm the argument raised by certain scholars that a middle class based on educational qualification and expertise confronts the old networks of patronage and loyalty (Robinson and Goodman, 1996:7). The next generation of middle class Chinese tends to break the network of their parents and build their own networks. The result of international education, moreover, has created the new link for young educated Chinese Indonesians. The affinity to global world and global citizen currently grows in parallel with their broader experience and stateless kind of occupations.

Considering the ways education empowers middle class Chinese to coping with violent circumstances, it is clear that it has exposed them to different world of experience and profession. They feel more secure when they are mobile in the sense that they do not completely reside in Solo and take profession different from their parents, which proved less capable of vertical mobility and guaranteeing their security during the riots in 1998.

iii. Finding the Social Networks through Religions; From Economic *Guanxi* to Religion *Guanxi*

In this section, I am going to relate religions among middle class Chinese Indonesians as part of Chinese Indonesian's identity building. The network among Chinese Indonesia is traditionally built through the clan similarity or line where same origin of ancestors and family names are used to draw the linkage. The business network is also one way to build the network, especially among bourgeoisie Chinese. Now as explored in this section, religion turns to have been another away of connecting Chinese groups like Taoism and Confucianism, or with non- Chinese groups like Islam and Christianity, particularly Charismatic Church movement. It is after 1998 that religion currently grows as channeling their identity building as to cope with difference and with problems inherent in their insecure mind as minority and insecure environment that treats them as defenceless groups.

Chinese Indonesians sees religion in many ways. During the period of Suharto, Chinese's religion was banned considering to the restriction to Chinese culture. The practice of Chinese beliefs and religions, such as Taoism and Confucianism, has officially banned though in the national constitution it is implicitly recognized as they confine to 'the believers of the Almighty', beside Islam, Catholic, Protestantism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Before Reformasi period, no laws ever issued as to clarify whether Taoism and Confucianism felt into that category. In the early year of New Order, the government issued Instruksi Presiden (Presidential Instruction) No 49/V/IN/1967 on the Board of Coordination Chinese Affairs in Indonesia. The board, known as Badan Koordinasi Masalah Cina, took control over issues and problems concerning Chinese Indonesians, more as means of surveillance and restriction. As the effect of the working of this board, temples of Taoism and Confucianism, for

example, were merged with the Buddhist temples.

The issuing of the policy indicates how the government took Chinese Indonesians seriously. The establishment of the board and its subsequent policies has influenced the development of many aspects of Chinese cultures. Many core rituals—part of religious practices and Chinese customs—disappeared from Chinese communities. Chinese schools were no longer operated; the Chinese New Year Eve was no longer celebrated; and Chinese temples were not allowed to have Chinese symbols and emblems.

At this phase, many of Chinese Indonesian felt more comfortable to convert into other religions and cultural practices. The explicit acknowledgement in the constitution of the five official religions in has forced them to choose one of the official religions. Many of them voluntarily convert to Buddhism—with the reason that this religion is closer to their traditional religions, but big part of the Chinese population has converted to Christianity. Those who did not explicitly convert to any official religions usually put Islam in their National Identity Card (Kartu Tanda Penduduk/KTP).

While the believers of Chinese religion were putting Islam on their KTP in order to get influential benefit in their relation with the majority of Muslim Indonesian, the case of Suparman, is perhaps the peculiar one since religion is smartly-played as the way to gain more in economic field, as to maintaining and enlarging economic, cultural, and social capital.

I know Suparman from Anto. Anto once told me that he and Suparman are friends since they were young and spent times in illicit activities. When they become older as they are now, they come back to the God's way. At present, Anto is member of of a Charismatic church while Suparman is active in Mujahidin Islam. In their youth, Suparman and Anto were partners in gambling industry in Solo in the early 1970s. Suparman was a influential preman at that time, while Anto managed printing business for gambling paper.

I met Suparman that morning in his office. He is a man with talkative and straight forwarded personality. He boasted to me that in the beginning of 1980s he was a richest man in Solo, because of his gambling business. Not just gambling, Suparman also told me that he was a beking (backing, support, or henchmen) of the conglomerates in Solo. He was

paid by them to protect their business and paid to make other businesses rivals collapse, sometimes in violent ways.

As he told me, he was like a snake. He was as slickly as those who worked in an underground or mafia world. As preman, he reached a vertical mobility, from a very poor young Chinese boy living in gang (small alley) into the big head gangster. He expressed to me about his past,

It was in the range of early 1970s until early 1980s I worked as gambling owners. I know that at that time many rivals and enemies tried to kill me, they send paid murderers to hurt me. But I was too strong. Everybody was so afraid of me. I made friend with big businessman, politicians, and police. I bribed them. I had all properties, very big houses, cars, everything. Yet, I know that slander and character assassination are really close in the dark business like this. In November 1983, the turmoil happened in Solo. The issue started from the fighting between a young Javanese and Chinese, Pipit and Kecak. Nobody knew what the exact cause of the fighting. But soon it turned to be an anti-Chinese riot or we called it with Geger Pecinan. Houses and business of Chinese were burnt and devastated. Solo was isolated for 2 days. After riots, police came to my house and arrested me. They said that I was dalang (literary. puppeteer, in this context means the creator) of conflict. I asked them, what was my interest in this riot? But polices kept me into prison. I was arrested for 7 months without any fair court with the accusation of being a dalang of riot. In the prison I finally knew who slandered me. It was really an intrigue between preman. I will not tell the name, but I know. In the prison, I arranged for committing murder. But later I changed my mind. In the prison I learned Islam teaching, and I switch to profess Islam, and be a better person.

He continued his story with the story after released from the jail. It was not easy to tell or show his religious conversion to his preman

fellows. But in the same time he needed his job in premanisme sector. But he stopped his activity after having heard from somebody that he was targeted in the so called Petrus operation (Penembakan Misterius-Mysterious Shooting operation held by military and police to fighting street criminals). He heard that his rivals sought to get him out the business by using the rumour of Petrus.

The simple reason why Suparman was being targeted in Petrus operation was his activity as preman and he has tattoos. That is the reason why he was jailed in 1980. Tattoos in the body became the signifier that enabled police and military to quickly distinguish preman from nonpreman or ordinary people. As mentioned by Joshua Barker (2001: 34), although having tattoos does not necessarily mean that a person is criminal, tattoos have signified the identity of criminals. As Suparman told in interview, many people, not only preman, with tattoos tried to remove their tattoos to avoid petrus operation.

The relation of tattoos and criminals, describe by Barker as in the chain as follows:

Criminal > prisoner > blacklist > identity file > tattoo noted in file > tattoo on body > fingerprint > criminal (Barker, 2001: 35).

Tattoos were also taken to signify that a person has ever been jailed due to some criminal activities. Suparman also experienced such signification. Hearing that he was the target of Petrus operation, he attempted to show his conversion to Islam publicly. After announcing his conversion, he stated his attachment to the only Islamic political party. He acknowledged that these movements saved his life. He supported a lot of money to that political party. After that he got many sympathies from society as enlightened person who transformed from ex-Chinese preman to a religious person. Even though he himself confessed that it was several years after his conversion that he could really understand what Islam is. His involvement in the political party continued. In the beginning of 1990s he joined into the New Order political party. Now, he is a director of a middle-size tobacco company in Solo, and in recent years he surprised those who know him with his membership in Islamic hard-line mass organization in the city.

Despite the obvious fact that using Muslim name is part of negotiation with powerful group or constraining circumstances, such as in the description of the figure of Suparman in his relation to Islam and society, big number of Chinese converted Christianity, Catholic or Protestantism. The International Herald Tribune⁴ reported that over 70 percents of Chinese Indonesian are now Christians. This wants to explain that although Confucianism has been over officially recognized in the last ten years, many Chinese remain members of the major religions.

However, Confucianism temples, which during New Order concealed as Buddhist temples, have started to declare their appearance as completely Confucianism temples. And it should be kept in mind that the conversion of many Chinese Indonesians into Christianity has taken place for long time, even during colonial period. Christianity seems more acceptable for Chinese. The thing that I highlighted in the religious dynamics in Solo is the growing development of Charismatic churches, mostly belonging to Protestantism. The churches of Charismatic movement in Indonesia can be identified as the churches which hold their religious practices in certain part of shopping mall buildings and mostly grow in urban areas.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) and Vasquest (2003) relate the trend of Charismatic cultures as part of globalization and modernization that bring more anxieties than hope. The presence of such religious movement is perceived by many people as offering new hopes and solidarity in dealing with the de-personalization and de-humanization process of modern life and institutions.

My relationship with Anto, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, has also brought me closer to his daily life or private affairs like his religious beliefs and preference. In a meeting with Anto and Saminto, they also told me that their relationship becomes more intense and closer since they both become members of of Titipan Allah Church (literary God entrusted). Titipan Allah is a church based on evangelical Christian or Charismatic movement. Titipan Allah church in Solo is led by a Chinese descent priest. It has attracted many Chinese to convert to Bethel Pentecostal Church. As we already discussed, the conversion of Chinese

4 'In Indonesia the Chinese go to Church,' International Herald Tribune, Thursday, 27 April 2006.

Indonesians into Christianity seems to appear as response to the official restriction of Chinese religion especially during New Order period. It is also the fact that following a Chinese priest is also a possible way to strengthen the familial and community ties (T.H Sumartana, 2003: 69).

Religion is taking the role as the new bridge for social connections. Even though in the decades of Suharto's regime Chinese Indonesians tended to avoid all discussions about religion, now the situation has a little bit changed. The effect of religious banned in Suharto's regime remains in place. Many Chinese still find that talking about SARA should be avoided, even though there has been greater room and freedom compared to the previous period.

Nevertheless, there are also growing number of Chinese who have critical awareness of the social injustice or with political issues, not explicitly stated in their direct connection to political and social movement, or certain ideology, but through the involvement in religious activity. This phenomenon is typical in all regions in the country, where political movement and political parties are mostly formed on the basis of religions rather than ideologies.

After riot 1998 and reformasi era has started, strengthening social networks through religion becomes the save option for Chinese Indonesians to initiate and maintain their social connection. From several personal stories mentioned earlier, being involved in the majority religion (Islam and Christianity) has opened the opportunity to be part of the major society.

Another example was given through the involvement of Chinese to the new religion movement (Charismatic Church), where this religion has tempted people from both majority and minority groups into conversion. Charismatic Church has elicited growing reaction and protests from many section of the population in the city. But this does not stop it from attracting more and more Chinese by it's zeal and appeal for 'being together' in time of peace and crisis.

Keesing (1987) quotes the notion of religion while Geertz (1966), asserts that as a system of symbol religion acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conception of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem

uniquely realistic. This conceptualization is fairly in line with the increasing power of Charismatic Church by which it's members (those converted) are drawn to think of it as source of motivation, encouragement and sense of order in their life circumstance, something that they think of as insecure and threatening. For them, this religion provides them not only with transcendental meaning or divine virtues a religious man has to acquired, but most importantly, social and cultural dimension that binds victims into a sense of powerful self and community.

Concluding Remarks

Middle class Chinese Indonesians use those three social aspects, which are economic network, education, and religion, as their forms of identity negotiation as survival and consolidating strategy alike. It seems very obvious that many forms of negotiation they have employed in post riots period aim to ensure that their sense of security needs to be strengthened by practical means and activities. What worth noticing is the fact that middle class Chinese Indonesians as a biggest group in membership and the most vulnerable group has employed or making use economic network, education, and religion as strategy to build their new form of identity negotiation.*****

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